TRANSCRIPT— SARAH ANN ROLAND WESTON HART

Interviewee: Sarah Hart

Interviewer: Zoe Rhine, Joe Newman, Roy Harris

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Zoe Rhine: Today is March 12th, 2018. And I'm Zoe Rhine, librarian in the North Carolina Room at Pack Memorial Library. And with me are two of the North Carolina Room Friends of the Library volunteers, Joe Newman and Roy Harris. And we're here to talk with and listen to Sarah Hart tell us about her life. And you can just start in with, if you wouldn't mind saying your full name and spell your last names, the hyphenated, and give us your parents' names.

Sarah Hart: Do I have to give you all my names?

[Laughter.]

ZR: Yeah. We've got ten minutes.

SH: Okay. My name is Sarah Roland Weston Hart; Sarah Ann Roland Weston Hart. Roland is my maiden name.

ZR: And that is spelled--

SH: R-o-l-a-n-d.

ZR: And it's Weston--

SH: W-e-s-t-o-n, and then Hart, H-a-r-t.

ZR: Okay.

SH: And that's all of my names.

ZR: And we'll want to hear how you got them all.

SH: And I was born in Mars Hill, North Carolina. My family moved from Yancey County. My dad used to always tell this, I would love for him to tell my age because he would always tell my age like five or six years younger than I really was. He said, “I know how old Sarah Ann is. We moved over here in January and she was born in August.”

So, as I say, my family came from Yancey County. We call it Cane River, Higgins, and every two years, when we have our family reunion year, we go back to the old home place. Because one of my aunts, the log cabin is still standing. We have our cemetery at the top of a hill up there. I mean, you know, I wasn't able to go the last two years because I couldn't go up there. The guy was not home to take us up there, take the older people up there, you know. But the younger people went and I got pictures and everything. They were just blown away at the way the cemetery is still there. Because it's like from, we have from 1800 on a tombstone from there.

ZR: Is there a town near there where we would know?

SH: Burnsville.

ZR: Burnsville is near there?

SH: On your way to Burnsville you'll see, it says “19/23 Higgins.” It's on your left. It's Higgins, North Carolina. They call it, it's Higgins. And it's at the top of a mountain. And that's where my family came from.

ZR: Both your parents?

SH: Well, my mother came from Bakersville. She was born in Bakersville. And then my daddy always lived in Higgins, you know, Cane River. And he was a product from my granddaddy, which is James Roland. He was from a slave owner. And so his mother was Black but his father was white. And he married my grandmother, Lizzie, which was a Black with Indian. I have pictures of all them, too. And they raised eight children. And my dad was second oldest. So he sort of, you know, I guess took care of the others.

ZR: Right. And you know Lizzie's last name before marriage?

SH: Who?

ZR: Lizzie, the grandmother, before she married?

SH: No, I do know, but I don't--I forgot. Lizzie, what was her name? I don't know. Maybe it will pop up.

ZR: You might go ahead and say both your parents' names.

SH: My mother's name was Mollie Carson. She was a Carson before she was a Roland. And my father's name was Arcemus Roland. He only had one name. And as I said before,

you know, I really didn't know that, until I got in the eleventh grade and in Mr. Dusenberry's class that we were talking about our families. And he said, “Did you know that was a French name?" And I said, “No.” But after we researched some we found out that the Rolands really originated in France, down here somewhere. So, you know, that's where they came, that Arcemus came from.

ZR: With a name like that you don't need a middle name.

SH: No. And, of course, we called him Seem. Everybody called him Seem because it was easier. So he was Arcemus. So those were my parents. And I had four brothers, one, two, three. There was eight of us. I only remember five, because my oldest sister and my two brothers died before I was born, over in Yancey County. And then I remember my two brothers and my two sisters. As I said, there was eight of us in the family.

ZR: Okay. And you were born in Mars Hill.

SH: Yes, I'm the youngest. And I have two half-sisters, as you know.

Roy Harris: I'm still trying to figure all of them out.

SH: Joyce.

RH: Joyce, uh-huh.

[Laughter.]

ZR: Is the house you were raised in still there?

SH: No. But the porch, which is a cement slab, is still there. I wished, but I didn't think about how important it was, and my son that lives on the farm, who lives there now, he

wished that I had not torn it down, you know, But he has really taken care of that slab, that porch there. And so every year, though, we go back to Mars Hill the first Sunday in September, you know, and have homecoming and decorate the graves and all that, because that's where all my family is buried, out in that cemetery.

Joe Newman: What type farming did you folks do?

SH: He was a tobacco farmer.

JN: Okay.

SH: And he did tobacco in Yancey County, and what I would love to know, and I guess we will never know, was where he got the money to come from Yancey County to Madison County, and he bought up over a hundred-some acres of land. Because he sold it, everybody said, “Oh, yeah, we bought this from Seem, we bought this from Seem.” And it's just interesting to know. Of course, back then, I guess you know, it's real cheap. But it was interesting to know how he, well, I guess he sold his house. He sold his farm in Yancey County and come over there, you know, to Mars Hill.

ZR: Well, you should be able to find records of the sale in Yancey County Courthouse. And you should find the records in Madison County, for the property he bought.

SH: Yeah, because it was a lot, you know, way over a hundred, maybe 200 acres, when it was all over.

JN: That was a big farm.

SH: Uh-huh.

ZR: Did he raise cattle or anything else?

SH: We had cattle, we had pigs, we had chickens. We didn't go to the store for anything, really, hardly, because we had a smokehouse and--because when he would kill hogs, you know, and he would go down to have the, you know, I guess the corn made into flour and all that, yeah.

ZR: So there was a mill near you that he took it to.

SH: Yeah, and we raised strawberries. We had apple trees. We had a, what they call a crow egg apple. You ever heard tell of that?

ZR: Huh-uh.

SH: Crow egg apple. You never heard tell of that either?

ZR: Huh-uh. Like c-r-o-w e-g-g?

SH: Uh-huh. Crow egg apple.

ZR: About the same size as a--

SH: It's a little shaped like, almost like a pear. And we had red delicious, we had green grapes, and we had purple grapes. We had a peach tree. I can remember that. And like I said, we had tame strawberries. So we had a big farm.

RH: What was the word you put in front of strawberries? You said tame?

ZR: Not wild.

SH: Not wild.

RH: Oh, okay.

SH: Yeah, we could just go and get them. Of course, we raised a garden. We had everything in the garden. I can remember my dad would take cabbage and stuff like that and put it in the ground and cover it up and then he could take it out and it would be good.

ZR: Not in a cellar? Just in the ground?

SH: Uh-huh. He'd put it in a certain place.

ZR: Can you describe your house you grew up in?

SH: My house was, let's see, one, two, three, there was three bedrooms. And then we had an upstairs that had a room, a loft. Yeah, we called it the loft. But we had a fireplace in my parents' bedroom, but the pot-bellied stove was in the living room. And that, of course, that's where we all, you know, sat there. And, of course, I had a room because, see, by the time--my oldest sister was 17 years old when I was born. So when I was born, she left. You know, she left going to--because in those days, when teenagers, they got grown, if they knew someone like in New York, Detroit, because we had cousins in Detroit, so she left there going to Detroit to take care, be an in-house maid. So that's what she did. That's where she started out.

ZR: Did she ever come back?

SH: No. She went from there to New York, and--well, she married before she left here. And then she divorced. And then she went from there to New York and from New York to Miami, Florida, and she stayed there for 30 years. She moved back in 1986, she moved

back home, because she lost part of her eyesight and she came back home to stay full time then.

ZR: What was her first name?

SH: Edna. And she was--got into the clothing industry. So when she went to Florida she, you know, really excelled doing that. And then she worked in the Miami Jewish, in the ceramic room, doing that. So she did a lot of things after she went to Florida. Like I said, she stayed there longer than she did anywhere else.

ZR: So other siblings that you grew up with?

SH: A sister, Geraldine. Geraldine lived in Mars Hill until she moved to Asheville and she lived there all, you know, practically all of her life. And then I had two brothers, Sherrill Rolland and Kenneth Roland. And both of those died, let's see. Sherrill died when he was like in his late fifties. And then Kenneth died because he had colon cancer. Kenneth died when he was like 62 or something like that. So those were the two brothers. And that was my family.

JN: So to put a time frame on this, Sarah, you grew up in the fifties; is that right? You're a little bit younger than me.

SH: Thank you. What year do you think I was born?

JN: Oh, goodness. Now you put me on the spot.

[Laughter.]

JN: Oh, let's see. I was born in '47.

SH: Oh, I was born before you.

JN: Okay. I heard it wrong last week, when we met you before.

SH: As I said, my daddy used to say, we moved to Mars Hill in January, 1939, and Sarah was born then.

JN: Okay. So we're talking about forties and the fifties for you kids growing up there.

SH: Yes. Yes. Yes.

RH: Do my friend Joe, you set that up in the beginning. He was over there trying to figure it out.

[Laughter.]

SH: Is that what he did? Okay.

JN: I had to ask.

ZR: Now, Joe, when were you born?

RH: Your story sort of goes from the top of the mountain to the valley to all over the world.

SH: Right.

RH: And then some of you came back to Asheville at some point.

SH: As I said, I was widowed twice. I grew up, well, I was married very young. And I moved to Weaverville. From Mars Hill to Weaverville to James Weston. And we had five children. And when I started--I did domestic work up until 1971. And I was--

ZR: In Weaverville?

SH: Uh-huh.

ZR: Okay.

SH: And I was working for, their name was Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rich. They were musicians in Mars Hill College. And I took care of their two boys and she came home one day and she said, “Sarah, there's a program"-- She said, “You're so good with children and I think you need to better yourself, you know. I think you've got the potential to do more.” So she said, “I'm going to bring you an application, fill it out because there's a program that started, it's called Career Opportunity Program, C-O-P, from Mars Hill College. And she said what they're doing is, because at that time, 1971, they did not have any, really, Black students, really, very few at Mars Hill. So what they were trying to do is get more Black teachers and get more Blacks into Mars Hill College. Well, it was college then. Mars Hill University. So, 1971, I put my application in. But there was a little thing there that, I lived in Weaverville, but you had to be like in Asheville area, around there. So I said, “Oh, my goodness.” She said, “Well, you don't know anyone in Asheville?" I said, “Yes, my brother.” So I gave my brother's address. So when my sister-in-law called one day and she says, “Sarah, you got a letter here from Mars Hill College.” I said, “Open it, open it, open it.” And she said, “You have been accepted in this program.” So I was just, you know, elated for that. I was just so happy. So I started Mars Hill College in 1971 and in 1973, with my stair-step children, that's when my husband died suddenly, James Weston. And my youngest was only seven and there I had three going into teenagers. And it was Randy and Stevie, they were the two

youngest ones. Randy was nine and Stevie would have been eight. He would have been eight.

RH: Randy's name is George, right?

SH: George. Yeah, George Randall. Yeah. Steven is my baby. He has one younger than he is.

But I was in the middle of college so I had been so young. James Weston was the only--well, I had the boyfriends and things like that. But James Weston was the only really man that I had ever, you know, known. So I was just so--I didn't know what to do, you know. I just did not know what to do. So my sister came home from Florida and, you know, she, you know, helped me and I wanted to really quit. I said, “I can't, I can't do this. I cannot raise these children and work and I mean, going to be in school. I'll just go back to domestic work. I'll just--"

So Miss Francine Delaney and Mrs. Zenobia Jones was two, and Mrs. Christine Avery, they were the three ladies that really said, “Sarah, you can't--you've come too far. You only have two more years and you can do it.”

ZR: How did you know them?

SH: I knew them through the program.

ZR: At Mars Hill?

SH: Yeah, they were all supervisors or something like. Mrs. Avery was supervisor over some and Miss Francine Delaney was, you know, we were in touch with them during the

program. They were all in that program. They did something, you know. Because we did have classes here in Asheville. I didn't have any college, so I had to go to school four years and I had to go to school four summers. But some of the girls that did not have college, they didn't have to go in the summer. You know, they just took the classes in the, you know, wintertime.

JN: Well, having your sister's help was really important.

SH: Well, my sister Geraldine, the one that stayed here, she just took--she just took care of me. And she left but I had, you know, my family. As I said, Geraldine was here. And then my church family and all that, you know, just told me, you know, you've got to go on.

ZR: Can I back you up one minute?

SH: Uh-huh.

ZR: Since you're talking about your education, I'd love to hear more about--

SH: Mars Hill?

ZR: Yeah.

SH: I started Mars Hill Elementary. I started at Mars Hill because it was in walking distance of my house. And I started there in the first grade and it was two rooms. And after our devotions every morning, they would divide it. And the first through the fourth grade I had--my teacher's name was Miss Best. She came from Asheville. Well, all the teachers came from Asheville.

ZR: B-e-s-t?

SH: B-e-s-t. And then when I got fourth through the eighth grade, I got--my teacher's name was Mrs. Owens, Grace Owens. And she lived in Asheville, too. And we had Miss Wilson, was like the principal. And she didn't have to go into the classroom to teach. They were all from Asheville. They would come from Asheville. And I can remember when it was really bad, you know, because Mars Hill can be really bad, that they would stay with someone. I know a couple of times they stayed with my family. They would stay with some families there in Mars Hill, some of the families, they had put out to spend the night. Because then there was just the two-lane road. And, you know, going into Mars Hill.

ZR: You probably don't know what any of their educational degrees were like?

SH: No, I don't. No. I really don't. I know Miss Wilson probably had the most education, you know, of them. Because she was like principal over, you know. Her name was Mary Wilson.

JN: That was in Madison County public school?

SH: Madison County Colored School.

JN: Right.

SH: Uh-huh.

JN: But supported by the County government?

SH: Yes. Uh-huh. First through the eighth grade. And that's what they, as I said, it was two rooms. And we had a pot-bellied stove, too, that the boys, you know, would cut wood and keep us warm in the, you know, wintertime.

ZR: Because I don't know Mars Hill well, was there a community name to where you lived in Mars Hill? Or was it just real central?

SH: They just called it the Long Ridge Colored Community, and ours was called Long Ridge School.

ZR: Okay.

SH: But we were just down in all the, you know, Black people stayed in one little section down off of Mt. Olive. You see, it's called Mt. Olive Drive now.

ZR: Okay. And did you have best friends in that time period?

SH: Oh, yes. Yes. I did. I still am in touch with one of them. Her name's Lorraine Wilson. She lives in Knoxville now. You know, I used to go to their house and she used to come to mine. And then, of course, Joyce's sister Essie, because Joyce was small then. But her sister, Essie and I, we were good friends because we were the same age. And we had, we had quite a few people, you know, to live in the neighborhood there, you know, we played with. Because, as I said, you know, other times I lived, and I would go and play, you know, with two white kids, you know. Every--in the evenings or on the weekends or something we'd play together. Because, as I said, it did not dawn on me, you know, why am I coming all the way here to school. Because we were not taught that, you know. We didn't see any color, I mean at home.

ZR: You didn't see any--

SH: Any color. I mean, you know, we weren't saying, you know, “You're white", “You're Black.” You know, that was not--

ZR: So you would go in each other's--Blacks would go in whites homes and vice versa?

SH: Yes, we would play. Yes.

ZR: Well, that's the way to grow up.

SH: Yeah, we growed up. And our teachers, though, was very, very strict and, of course, they did corporal punishment. And if you did not learn certain things, you know, you just got a spanking for it. So you knew you had to learn it. We did have Black history. They did tell us a little bit about some, you know, Black history, people. And, as I said, they made sure that we really got an education. You know, we really was ready. And in May of every year we used to have--we always had a big program and everybody was so happy because they all learned their part, because they wanted to be out, you know, in front. And we would have decorations, decorate the stage. And it was a big thing. Everybody from the community would come and so that was one thing in May, just before school was out.

And also, my later years, when I was in the seventh or eighth grade, we took trips to Cherokee. And I have pictures of those, too. In Cherokee, on this bus, yeah. And that would be our field trip for the year. The last two years I can remember going there. Yeah.

ZR: I assume the teachers were Black.

SH: Oh, yes. Uh-huh. Yeah. They were all Black.

JN: And was the Black history taught as a separate unit or was it just kind of woven into the--

SH: It was just woven into, you know, because we didn't know, you know. Nanny Burrows, Charlotte Hawkins Brown. You know, they would just tell us, three B's in education, you know. And then, of course, we learned about Harriet Tubman and, you know, all that. But it was woven in, it was just part of the curriculum because, of course, we got our books from the County. But they like deviated from there sometimes. You know, they would put in the Black history, you know, things that they, you know. I guess with them being from Asheville or wherever, that they, you know, had the resources that they could give us, you know, those. So we did.

RH: Were they hand-me-down books?

SH: Yes.

RH: I thought I was missing something, like you all got new books.

SH: Oh, no, no, no. No, we got hand-me-down books. But we thought they were new.

ZR: It was a book.

SH: And we had a traveling library that came twice a month. And I read a lot, I was an avid reader. I loved to read. And I would read all of my books and then some of the time, you know, the truck would come back and I, you know, would get more books. But you

could only get so many. But we did have, we did have a library. Twice a month they came.

ZR: Those bookmobiles are amazing.

SH: Yeah.

ZR: So tell me about, I assume you went downtown Weaverville some, with your parents or--

SH: My parents--you mean Mars Hill?

ZR: Okay. Yeah, I'm sorry. Mars Hill.

SH: Yes. Very seldom. Well, we would walk--that's where we had to go to the store and it was a mile from where we lived to the town of Mars Hill. So we would walk there to get, you know, groceries or whatever we needed. Plus, my father had a little hen. Another man, my cousin's husband, they had a little store called Ray and Roland Groceries. And they had like candy, flour, sugar. You know, it was just a little thing then. And I still have my father's, it's just a little pad. It's a little book. Had like five or six pages in it. And he would put on there who owed him and what they owed him. And I found that in some of his things, too, when he died. Yeah. So he still had that. He still held on to that.

ZR: So did you find segregated places when you went into Mars Hill?

SH: Oh, yeah, well, we didn't--we just went to school. We knew not to, you know, go anywhere else.

ZR: You wouldn't have gone to a restaurant?

SH: Oh, no. They probably didn't have none. They probably just had one clothing store, probably, then. I don't even know whether they had a restaurant or not. Probably on the college campus. But they probably did. But I just don't remember, you know, because we were just going there for one thing, you know. We had to go to the store, you know, for what we wanted, and come out. So that was all.

RH: When you said clothing store. Did you wear flour-sack dresses?

SH: Yes. My mother made them. I was like a little tomboy, too. I liked to wear pants a lot, you know, because I would wear dresses and they would get torn so easily. And Mama said, “Okay. Okay.” But she would make my clothes. And even when--but when I started high school, my sister in Florida, Edna, made sure that I was not wearing any more, you know, because she knew I was going to high school. And she had a little taste of it, because she had gone to Allen High School for her first two years, ninth and tenth grade, before she left going to, you know. And so she made sure that Sarah was dressed.

ZR: That's wonderful.

SH: So, yeah. Yeah, she made sure I was dressed.

ZR: Any more memories about the school there?

SH: As I said, we had a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun. And we had a playground that we would play in. We had recess. And just good memories of the kids that we4re there and how close we--we were close knit, like family. You know, we were just like family. Of course, we fought, of course.

ZR: Just like family.

SH: Yeah. And, you know, it was so good, you know, close knit. Family together.

JN: Did you have one classroom for each grade? All the first-graders were in one class or were there enough of you all that you had maybe separate?

SH: As I said, we had two rooms. The first through the fourth was in this room--

JN: Oh, okay.

SH: --and the fifth through the eighth was in that room. How the teacher got around and how she taught all of us, I don't know.

JN: Boy, that's a big job, to do that.

SH: Yes, but I don't think there was not any more than maybe 15 in each room. Maybe more than that when you got more than that. But, you know, how she taught all those grades, I don't know.

RH: Were the kids in this same environment that didn't go to school? That you grew up with?

SH: Everybody went to school that I knew. They even--we had some to even come like maybe 7 or 8 miles, that lived--it was still Mars Hill but they lived sort of out a little bit. They used to come. They came to school there, too.

ZR: As you went further in school, did you ever have any idea if you were as well educated or more educated or less educated than people from other schools?

SH: No. I didn't really think about it.

ZR: Okay. So then you, after you got through eighth grade in Mars Hill--

SH: I went to Allen High School, which was an all-girls school, in the ninth grade. And we were bused. Our bus came from--the bus driver lived in Marshall. He would go to Hot Springs and pick those kids up. Then he would come back through Marshall, then he would come to Mars Hill to pick us up and bring us here. And we would all ride, you know, what grade you was in.

So I was the only one getting off at Allen. Because my sisters, Geraldine and Edna, had gone there. So my dad said, you know, whatever they did, you know, "Okay, you have to go to." So I was just so unhappy. And so that summer, after ninth grade, Lorraine, one of my best friends, she begged my dad all summer. And I cried. I was my dad's pride and joy, so I know, when he saw tears, so he finally let in. Okay. I'm going to let her go to Stephens-Lee. So that's when I started at Stephens-Lee, tenth grade. I was riding the same bus.

JN: Now Allen was a private school.

SH: Yes, it was a private girls' school.

JN: You know, I don't know much about it. Was it a church-supported school?

SH: Yes. Methodist, yes. The girls came from all over, everywhere. Uh-huh.

JN: Had it been in existence a long time? Did it maybe go back farther than Stephens-Lee, even?

SH: I don't think so. I don't--did it?

ZR: Yes. It was turn of the century.

JN: Okay.

SH: Because I really don't know much about that.

JN: It wasn't a high school until later.

SH: I don't know really much about Allen.

JN: I was going to guess that it started out in the days before there was any public high school for Black people at all. That's why I was asking how far it went back. Okay.

SH: I really don't--.

ZR: Do you remember any of the teachers there? At Allen?

SH: One name was Mrs. Burton. But she came to Stephens-Lee. And Miss Walker was the science teacher. And about four years ago, five years ago, I went to the memorial for Miss Walker. She was out at Brooks Howell and, it was somebody that went to Allen got in touch with me and said, "You know, Miss Walker died." So it was several of us that went out there to the, her memorial. She was at Brooks Howell. And Bolden, Ruth Bolden was one of my teachers. Those are the ones that I remember.

RH: At Allen?

SH: At Allen. Uh-huh.

RH: Then Miss Bolden went on to Asheville High, too.

SH: Uh-huh.

RH: Okay. So Allen closed in--

SH: I don't know.

RH: Okay. There's a history, Allen closed, I think.

SH: Right, it did.

RH: So some of those teachers may have--

SH: Gone to, after segregation come, I think that's when it, you know, it closed, too.

ZR: That makes sense. It seems it was about right in that time.

SH: Uh-huh. Right in there somewhere.

ZR: So you lived, you continued to live in Mars Hill all through high school?

SH: Yes. Oh, yes. And, as I said, I got married at a very young age and moved to Weaverville. And that's where I started my family. And my husband's people all was in, his mother and--not all of them, was in New York. So after my first child was born, he went up there to get a job and I followed him.

Well, I got pregnant again. And I was eight months pregnant and he was a job here and a job there and I called my sister, Edna, in Florida, and said, “Edna, I'm going to come home.” So she sent for me. I came home on the train. I was eight months pregnant.

And Oscar, my second child, was born in June and, of course, my husband came back here in August, because I lived with my parents until he came back in August. So we stayed with my parents until October. So in October 1958, yeah, '58, we moved to

Weaverville. And that's where, you know, the rest of them was born there. So we got the house--it was James's old family house that him, he was born in, and you know, it had four rooms and a path.

[Laughter.]

ZR: And was that on Hill Street?

SH: That was on, just as you start down, you go down Hillside. And, you know, I told you where my son live up there? That used to be an old house up there. That was their family house until they tore it down and, of course, in '70, when I started school in '71, we bought, it was almost like a double-wide, but it was four bedrooms and of course we had to have that big, you know, trailer up there. We put it up there. But son lives up there now, of course he had another--the other one wasn't any good after that.

But after we tore that one down, tore the old house down, then in '71 I think it was, yeah, when I started school we bought a trailer. We moved in there then.

ZR: You mentioned your church before, that beautiful old white church on Hillside?

SH: Uh-huh.

ZR: Can you tell me the name of it?

SH: Little Mount Zion.

ZR: And is it not being used anymore?

SH: Oh, yeah.

ZR: As a church?

SH: Yeah, that's where I go to church.

ZR: Well, you said it was your church, but there's no sign on it.

SH: I know. And I fussed-- See, I was gone like 22 years, almost 23 years. And when I came back, I said, “You know, we still don't have a sign.” So that's what we're working on, you know. But Mr. Harris know, lot of people think I belong to his church, Mount Zion, because I'm there so much. But, you know, you come back and, I don't know what it is, it's like I said, it's like a home. Family is like church. And the people are in the same place they was when we left. You know. And I just hate to, I guess in a way I hate to really leave sometimes because two of my sons still go there. And I think about all the, you know, my husband's grandparents that went there, you know.

ZR: Yeah.

SH: But sometimes I just have to--I mean, I have to visit other churches. At least twice a month. I mean, I do. I love my church and everything, but I do. Yeah.

ZR: It's held up really well.

SH: Yeah, and we just bought the whole--how many acres was it? Something acres, we just bought it, that's behind it. So now we own all the way from the--you see where it said Hillside Community Center? Well, we bought that about, before I came home that was bought. So just about six months ago we bought--we stepped out on faith--and we bought the land that was behind the church over there. And now we own all the way down from the church, all the way down to the community center. And the property that's behind it

there. So they're thinking about making a parking lot or either enlarging, because it needs some work on the inside. We need a bathroom upstairs.

ZR: Pretty soon it will be Big Mount Zion.

[Laughter.]

SH: Well, see, it came from his church, because, of course, Mount Zion was first so they just named that Little Mount Zion, you know. So that was, you know, came out that way.

RH: Was that some members from Mount Zion that started Little Mount Zion or--

SH: You know, I think there was a preacher they said, many, many, many years ago, that was, you know, had something--

RH: Or some disagreement.

SH: Yes. Yes, yes., yes, yes. So we're in debt now a little bit, but we're going to make it. We're going to make it. Yeah, we're going to make it. But we are working on a sign and so I said, you know, it's something really a lot of people ask, “What is that little white--it's a church but there's no sign there, you know?"

ZR: It seems like it would be more likely to be vandalized or something, without a sign. Or maybe everyone around there knows and--

SH: Oh, they do. They do. I don't think it's ever been broken into or--I think maybe two or three years ago they put a lock on it, you know, the oil tank in the back. But otherwise, you know, nobody bothers it.

ZR: Well, thanks for backing up, because I really wanted to hear you talk about being in school in Mars Hill. So you brought us up to 1973, when your husband died. And then you were talking about how other teachers there encouraged you to somehow keep on going to school.

SH: To school. Because, see, the program, Career Opportunity Program, what we had to do--as I said, I didn't have any college--what we had to do, for four years, we had to be an aide, an assistant in the school. So I was at Claxton my four years that I was going to school, as an aide. Of course, you know sometimes if teachers was out--

ZR: Yeah, you get it all.

SH: Yes, you was the teacher. And I told people when I went to Virginia, I said that was a very, very great learning experience for me, you know, to have those four years as an aide. And then in 19--I graduated in 1975. That's when I got a job up at Randolph Elementary.

ZR: Okay, now the Career Opportunity Program, was that not giving you a college degree?

SH: Yes, it was.

ZR: Okay.

SH: Yeah, that's what it was called. And I told you I cheated on, you know, I lived, so Mr. Booth--he's dead now--but Mr. Booth was the like supervisor over it. So I never will forget. When I went across the stage to get my diploma, he said, “Congratulations, Sarah Weston from Weaverville.”

[Laughter.]

SH: So I think he knew it, but, you know. So he knew I had ...[?] a little bit.

ZR: Were your kids there?

SH: Yes, yes.

ZR: And were your parents still alive?

SH: No, no, no, no, no. My--yeah, my dad was. I lost my mom when I was only 30. No, she died before. I was in my late twenties or something when she died. Because she had, they called it hardening of the arteries but it was Alzheimer's, and she had very bad arthritis.

Well, my dad got sick in '75, '74. And in '74, in November of '74, he raised his tobacco that year, '74. But he was getting sick. Because he had chronic leukemia but they said that helped that he had other blood issues. So that was his last--in December when he sold his tobacco, we knew that, you know, that he couldn't-- So he stayed sickly and I graduated Mars Hill May the 18th, 1975. Three weeks later he died. He was not able to come to my--and I have a picture of me in my gown and he was sitting out in the yard, you know, and he was just so proud of me.

You know, before he got sick, he would tell everybody, “You know, Sarah Ann is going to be a teacher, blah, blah, blah, blah.” You know, because, see, after I married and started having children, he said, “Oh, I know she's not going to be anything, you know.” Because I always talked that I'd like to be a teacher. Told him I wanted to be a teacher, wanted to do this, wanted to be that.

And at that time, really, they had this program at Winston-Salem Teachers College, is what it was called then in Winston-Salem, teachers college. And he had taken out some kind of insurance or something to pay a little bit, I guess, each year. He wanted me to go because I always wanted to be--I always wanted to be a teacher and he knew that. So I was just so happy, you know, that he lived to see. Three weeks later he died. Yeah, 1975. June 1975.

ZR: Cutting it close.

SH: Yes, it was.

JN: Sarah, you were one of the first African Americans students then, at Mars Hill College?

SH: Well, Oralene Simmons Graves, Oralene Graves Simmons, she went there for the first, you know. But I was like the first Black from Mars Hill to graduate from Mars Hill College. But she went there, I think a year or maybe two years, and she--

JN: Did she graduate from there, too?

SH: No. She did not. No, she didn't graduate.

JN: So you were early in the history of integration at Mars Hill.

SH: Yes, at Mars Hill. Uh-huh.

ZR: Were there other Blacks graduating with you?

SH: Oh, yeah, there was quite a few from Asheville, yeah. There was quite a few Blacks that--and, you know, we went all through the counties. Some went to the counties, some

went to city. A lot of us went to city schools, you know, the city. So there was quite a few.

And then what really--

RH: Was this the first graduating class--

SH: Uh-huh.

RH: --of the CO--

SH: COP.

RH: --Program, 1975? Okay.

ZR: Were you having to work, as well, when you were taking classes at Mars Hill and raise your kids?

SH: Oh, yeah. Because see, I had to go to Claxton every day from 8:30 to 3:00. And they would buy books and we would get paid for it.

ZR: You would get paid for it?

SH: Oh, yeah, we would get paid for it.

ZR: Good. Uh-huh.

SH: And we would go, as I said, they had classes here two nights a week, in Asheville.

ZR: Why in Asheville and not in Mars Hill?

SH: Because this was like most of the people lived in Asheville.

ZR: Okay.

SH: All the people, just about, lived in Asheville. Yeah, all of them did but me.

JN: And they thought you did.

SH: Yes, they thought I did for a while. And then, but as I said, the ones did have some college, they did not have to go the whole summer. But I had to go all summer, all summer long for four years, in the summertime.

ZR: So I'm just so confused about what place Mars Hill College had in--did they just--were they one of the places working with the COP, or--

SH: What you mean?

ZR: Well, you said the people you were working for, the Riches, that they were musicians at Mars Hill.

SH: Yes, and they were teachers at Mars Hill.

ZR: Okay. And that she--they told you about the COP.

SH: Uh-huh.

ZR: So did that have any--well, you graduated from Mars Hill. I'm just--so I would have thought all the times would have been at Mars Hill, yeah.

SH: All the what?

ZR: Classes would have been at Mars Hill.

JN: Was that a Federal program or a state program?

SH: Yes.

JN: So probably other universities, colleges, would have had programs like that.

SH: Yes, something like that program going on.

ZR: So what building in Asheville did you come to?

SH: Was it a building on A-B Tech? An old building? I believe they used to call that Asheville--

RH: ...to figure out this program here, and then class of 1975. Because I've heard that before. Somebody at the church, Miss Dorsey, I think.

ZR: Uh-huh. Probably so.

RH: And then Zenobia Jones. I've heard that from people at the church, “Oh, I went to Mars Hill.” Okay, I didn't know what it was.

SH: Right.

ZR: Uh-huh.

SH: So that program, even though I graduated '75, there were people came after me, you know. The program didn't last too too long after that. Then when I got to Randolph, when I finished in '75, Western Carolina had a program they called Teacher Corps, whereas they wanted the teachers to go get a masters degree. So I was in that class for a year and I just couldn't. With three teenagers in the house. But I could not do it. I hated it, I said here I have gone a year and a half trying to get my masters and I just could not do it. My mind would not.

ZR: How long would the program have been?

SH: Two years.

ZR: Oh, gosh. Go, Sarah, go.

SH: I know. That's the reason why I told them, when I graduated, I went, you know, after I left and went to George Mason and, you know, that's where I got my masters degree is from George Mason University in Virginia. And I told them, I said, "You robbed me of one but you didn't rob me of this one." So I finally got my masters degree, yeah. But, oh yeah, we'd drive down to Western Carolina and carpool. And there were several that got their masters. You know, Kokeeta[?] Kay.

ZR: What's that name again?

SH: Kokeeta Kay. She was one of them. Johnny Walker. Who else? Quite a few, you know, that went to Western Carolina, that got their--

ZR: And then they stayed in the Buncombe County School System, teaching?

SH: Buncombe and Asheville City. They stayed there and taught. I retired. Most of them retired. Couple of them had died.

JN: Was Hill Street School still open when you were teaching at Randolph?

SH: Yes.

JN: Okay. Were both of them integrated or were--

SH: No. Well--

JN: Was Hill Street School?

SH: You know, I did have some, one year I had one or two white kids.

JN: At Randolph.

SH: At Randolph.

JN: Okay.

SH: But see, what Randolph did, they--we got most of the kids from the projects. We got kids from Hillcrest, and we got kids from Klondike, we got kids from Livingston, over that way. You know, that's where they put really--that's where all the kids started. Yeah.

JN: If I understand it right, Randolph had been a white school.

SH: Yes.

JN: But I guess when a lot of changes came to Montford and the whites moved out, it became a--not being designated, but it became a Black school.

SH: Right. Because there was quite a few Blacks that lived in the Montford area. Blake Street and all that down through there were a lot of Blacks, you know, lived in that neighborhood. Quite a few.

RH: You know, along that timeline, you would have had white flight from Montford.

JN: Oh, yeah. A lot of it.

RH: And then at the same time, you would have the Model Cities Program and the gentrification and all of that in Southside. So I remember someone telling once that

people went to--all these homes were available in Montford now. And one of the problems that my friend says that they couldn't afford to keep them up with the taxes and even just to heat them, because they were not using--from the pot-bellied stove into all of a sudden you have this big house. So that was one of the issues, is that white flight took off in Montford, and other places in the city, too. So these homes became available. It's an interesting timeline. And I hear you talking and I'm like, you were in all of it.

[Laughter.]

SH: In the midst of all of it.

ZR: Somehow we missed hearing about Stephens-Lee.

SH: Where does Stephens-Lee come in?

ZR: Jumping around.

SH: Jumping around from elementary to college.

ZR: Before we get to your second husband, let's get to your high school.

[Laughter.]

SH: Well, now, I was a widow for 11 years. So when Stevie graduated, I said, Sarah, it's your time. Yeah. But Stephens-Lee. You want to hear about Stephens-Lee?

ZR: I do.

SH: Okay. Stephens-Lee. I started Stephens-Lee in 1953. And I would get up early in the morning and, of course, my mom would always have breakfast and my dad had to milk

the cow and all that. So the bus would come around quarter of 7:00, 7 o'clock. And the bus was here. And in the afternoon, you know.

JN: And how long a bus ride was that?

SH: Oh, around those two-lane highways, I know it was maybe sometimes an hour. If the roads were bad or something like that, it may take--and sometimes he could not get out of Hot Springs or Marshall and go to school.

ZR: Now was there a high school for whites in Mars Hill?

SH: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

ZR: So this would have been all Black students being bused?

SH: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

ZR: And, of course, they had white schools in Hot Springs and Marshall, too. But Mars Hill, too. But it wasn't integrated then. Really, it didn't integrate in Weaverville, because my husband drove a school bus. He drove it from Barnardsville to Leicester--we call it Lester [phonetic]. He would pick up kids in Barnardsville, Leicester and Weaverville. And my two oldest went to Shiloh School the first two years. My third child was when they integrated and Cecil was the one that integrated. How old was Cecil then? He was five. Because he went to kindergarten. It was sixties. Cecil was my first child to go to Weaverville School. The other two went, Robbie went the first and second grade and when she got in third grade and Oscar went in first grade, he came to Weaverville in the second grade.

See, the first three are only 16 months apart so they was-- It was 60 something that, when they integrated, that Cecil, my third child, is the first one to go. That's when they integrated schools in Weaverville, because he got to go to kindergarten. And see, the others did not go to kindergarten because Shiloh did not have kindergarten. You started in first grade. They didn't have a kindergarten. Just like Mars Hill. We didn't have a kindergarten. We didn't know what kindergarten was, you know, we went in the first grade when we got six years old.

And as I said, we would leave early that morning. Sometimes it would be an hour, hour and a half to come back. Then he would go pick up and then we'd go home in the afternoon and start all over again the next day. And I did that for the, you know, the four years that--

ZR: You graduated in '57?

SH: '57. Class of '57.

ZR: Okay. And can you tell us some of your favorite teachers at Stephens-Lee?

SH: Mr. Dusenberry was one. Miss Pierce was one and she became Miss Forney. Miss Carolina was okay. Mr. Burton and--what was the other teacher's name? Hmmm. There was two Burtons. The other was Lucille Burton that, you know, I had. Then Miss Boldon. Miss Boldon came up here, too. And, yeah, those were just some that I can, you know, still remember.

JN: What do you remember about Miss Forney? But it was Pierce then.

SH: Miss Pierce. She was just so petite. She was so small and petite. And she really, you know, she really pushed you. And I know Mr. Harris can relate to this. Now, we had programs, too. We had plays and things, too. But one thing that I picked up, if you were lighter-skin, you had good hair or long hair, you got pushed up front in all the programs. Am I right? Am I right?

There was--I don't know if the Black teachers, they were prejudiced or anything, but that's just the way it was. So I got pushed up, you know, in programs and, you know, things like that. My hair was always down my back and, you know. So I was in a lot, Miss Pierce put me, you know, we were in a lot of programs and I still have a picture of, she had career day and this was Japan.

So then, as I said, Mr. Dusenberry, he was my homeroom teacher when I was in eleventh grade. And, oh, yeah, I can't forget Mr. Cowans because, you know, he--

JN: What was his name?

SH: Cowans.

JN: Cowans?

SH: Uh-huh. He was like a science teacher. Yeah. So-- And Stephens-Lee had, you know, like you said, if teachers were very, very concerned about you. I mean, you know, if you were in drama class or whatever class you were in, you know, you had to walk, you know, they taught you things, how to walk and how to talk. And when you came out, you know, you was, I mean you was really ready.

ZR: Ready to go?

SH: Uh-huh, ready to go.

ZR: Would you say you had friendships with any of those teachers?

SH: Probably with Miss Pierce, Miss Forney. You know, she would have a group of us sometimes to come and each lunch with her or something like that, you know. But, see, I lived in Mars Hill.

ZR: Right. So you--

SH: I did get to come to--I couldn't play basketball or anything like that, you know, because I couldn't stay after school. I didn't have any way. And I did come to one prom, my 11th grade prom. I did get to come to that, because I spent the night with--my mother knew this lady that lived in Asheville. Her daughter was in 12th grade and I was in 11th., so I spent the night with her. And so I got to come to the prom then.

ZR: So I guess you didn't walk around Asheville much, either.

SH: Well, no, not really. See I came up here in 10th grade. 11th grade we had this little clique. There was four of us. Lorraine was one. Louise and Patricia and Sarah. So, you know, we were all from Mars Hill, so we called ourselves the Four Aces. So one day we decided to play hooky.

RH: Oh, oh. Here it comes.

SH: And I still blame one of my classmates today. He said he didn't, but I told him he had another guy saw us uptown and they came back and told Mr. Tolliver. The next day we were in Mr. Tolliver's office, because we had been ratted on. But no--

ZR: What did you get for that?

SH: Oh, well, sort of spanking or whipping when I got home, when I finally got home. But now, I'd come to Asheville on Saturdays, because there was a bus station and the Blacks would go around the back. We had a place where we'd go around the back because there was a bus going from Asheville to Weaverville. One of the long buses, you know, twice a week. I know it run on the weekends. Maybe one day during the week. And you would go down--I used to go down to the bottom to see how many would catch the bus and get off at the back of Kress's.

ZR: Okay.

SH: Uh-huh, and that's where we would get off the bus and then we would, you know, go wherever. Come down on Eagle Street, at the YMI, you know, or wherever.

ZR: I'm trying to think where the bus station was then. Was it on Patton Avenue or Coxe?

SH: I can't remember. It was more Coxe.

ZR: Because there was one where the post office is now. Was it?

SH: I know it was over that way somewhere. See, people used to tease me because we would meet them there and so young, they said that my husband kept me pregnant and barefoot until I didn't go to Asheville that much. Only come to church and usher union. I would usher sometimes or something like that. Because I didn't, really and truly, I did not start driving until two years before my husband died, is when I learned to drive. And I said that was a godsend, right there. Because after he died, you know-- And I did not, really, I did not know that much about streets here in Asheville.

ZR: Uh-huh.

SH: I head to learn them because, see, when I went I was with my husband. And he drove, you know. But I did come from, I did drive most of the time from--we only had one car--most of the time from Weaverville to Claxton. Now, I knew how to do that.

RH: Just down Merrimon Avenue?

SH: Yeah. That's what we did, because we did not have the expressway then. It was straight down Merrimon Avenue. Yeah, so that was--as I said, I was late blooming and started driving.

ZR: So you stayed at Randolph until you left here?

SH: Yes, I did. I was at, as I said, Claxton for four years and then I was at Randolph for 12. Yeah, 12 years teaching, before I left.

RH: Could you back up just a little bit. The day you graduated from Stephens-Lee.

SH: Okay.

RH: What was that like?

SH: Well, see, I didn't graduate with the class at Stephens-Lee.

RH: Okay.

SH: I was the class of '57 but, see, what I did is, I got pregnant. And in those days they did not let you go to school. So I went back--

ZR: They didn't let you take classes?

SH: Huh-uh.

ZR: Okay.

SH: And when my dad found out about it, I was four or five months pregnant already, when he found out about it. All of a sudden, I started gaining weight. So what the class of '57, what I did is, I went to get my GED and then the class of '57 said, okay, you were our class up until--because I went to school up until the end of December.

ZR: [Laughing] Oh, wow.

SH: Yeah. Yep. So, but as I said, I'm there, they just said you're the class of '57.

ZR: That's great to have support, to have a class, even though you were--

SH: Oh, yeah. They knew, because as I said, I was there until December.

JN: Was there a lot of emphasis at Stephens-Lee in getting kids ready for college?

SH: Yes.

JN: And if you were one of those kids, did you get a, I would say special classes, but did you maybe have 11th grade English, for instance, that was taught at a different level from 11th grade English for other students?

SH: No. No, I can't remember that.

JN: They call that tracking. Ability grouping in the elementary grades.

SH: Ability grouping. Right.

JN: They call it tracking in high school.

SH: Right. Not that I was, you know. I made good grades all the way through. I think I got one C in home ec.

[Laughter.]

SH: But otherwise, you know, I got good grades. But now they did have, when we got in the 11th grade, the Crown and Scepter Club. That's when they pushed you up.

ZR: That's what I was wondering about, what that was, because it's in all the yearbooks.

JN: I was, too.

SH: Crown and Scepter Club was where they pushed, you know, to take advanced, like you said, advanced classes.

JN: Okay. That was just for the senior year then?

SH: Junior and senior year.

JN: Junior and senior. Okay.

SH: Uh-huh.

ZR: So teachers chose those students?

SH: Uh-huh. Yeah. So you were something if you was in the Crown and Scepter Club, you knew that you were. And as I said, you know, with me living in Mars Hill, I couldn't be involved with a lot of the things that--

ZR: Couldn't participate, yeah.

JN: Well, that was hard.

SH: Yeah. Because we used to drive up here before that road--well, they messed up that roadbed, because this was the gym and we would be driving up and they would get all on this, they'd say, “Here comes the country bumpkins", because here comes the bus--

ZR: [Laughing] From Mars Hill.

SH: -- from Mars Hill. Here come the bus from Weaverville. We had one bus from Black Mountain and Swannanoa. See, because they all bused in back then, you know, they bused us all in here.

JN: I bet some of those kids did get teased.

SH: Oh, yes, they did.

JN: Country folks.

SH: Yes, we did. Yes, we did.

ZR: So, just to make your life sort of make sense, and you had referred to it, but you met your second husband here?

SH: No. No. I met my second husband at--my sister-in-law now is Zeda, which sorority I belong to. So at the time I was a Zeda, I became a Zeda in 1980. So we went to Richmond to the big, they have this big conference every year, for everybody, all of the states, you know. All the states meet together. So it was in Richmond. So I was the only one that had an up-to-date car. So there was four of us that went to Richmond. And none of us had gowns for that Thursday night, so my sister-in-law now said, “Well, I have a

sister--I have two sisters and three brothers that live in Maryland and DC. Why don't we go up there because one of the ladies"--Hazel Turner, did you know her?

RH: Uh-huh.

SH: Hazel Turner had people in New Jersey. Anna Cameron, she had a friend in some part of Virginia. Well, I didn't know anyone up that way. So my sister-in-law now, she said, “Well, you can stay with my sister and I", my sister up there then. She's dead now, but she was a widow then. So we went up. That was on a Friday, Thursday night, we went up there. So that Saturday my sister-in-law now has a son. Percy. He lived in Maryland so he had a big cookout there. So I had my little Zeda shirt on. Everybody said that I flirt. I don't flirt, do I?

[Laughter.]

SH: I've been accused of flirting. So my husband was a good cook. I mean, he was an excellent cook. So he was on the grill. And I had my Zeda shirt on and I said, “Oh"--because he was my brother. I didn't know then that he was my sick one. He was my brother. So he kept cooking. Then he would come inside and fix me and his cousin drinks, you know, we were fixing little drinks. So we started talking. So he said, “Well, I'm in the midst of a divorce.” He was getting a divorce. So I said, “Oh, no.” He said, “Well, I have a brother in town.” And he says, “I'm coming to Asheville in about two months.” He said, “Can I call you?" So I says, “Oh, sure.”

[Laughter.]

SH: So I gave him my telephone number. But in the meantime, on the way back, I had been back like two days and I was driving in Biltmore and the old Hardee's. It's where it is now but you that street that goes straight across. What do you call that street? It goes straight across. Some kind of way, Boston Way? You know, it goes straight across there. Well, me and one of my little grandkids were--I was driving there and we were just singing and having a good time. And all of a sudden, this old car came out--I don't know where it came out from. But I tried to speed up. If I hadn't speeded up, she would have hit me straight on my side. But she hit the back of me. And, oh, God, it just shook me all up.

So when he came to town, I had this brace and things on, so he called me, so I said, “Oh, you know, I'm sick.” So he called me again. He said, “I'm at my sister's house.” And he said, “Well, I'm leaving in the morning. Can we have breakfast at Shoney's?" That's when Shoney's was on Hendersonville Highway.

ZR: Uh-huh.

SH: So I said, “Sure.” So we went to Shoney's and I don't know what happened. We only dated for a year and a half and we were married. We got married. Yeah.

RH: That's the Hart fellow, right?

SH: Right. Uh-huh.

RH: So was Hart some of the Hart family here?

SH: No. No, they weren't related.

ZR: And he was living in Maryland.

SH: Yes. Because he was a patent attorney and he had been living there for 30, 40 years. You know, a lot of years there, in the Maryland area, he lived there. And so, yeah, we dated. That was in '82, at the end of '82. We got married April of '84.

JN: And you all moved pretty quickly up to the DC area?

SH: Yes. Yes, we did. As soon as school was out.

JN: Did you move to Maryland or--

SH: No, we moved to Virginia. We moved to Alexandria, Virginia, because that's where he had an apartment, his apartment there. And then we lived there for a year and a half. He says, “We're paying all this money.” Because we only had one car, because all he had to do was go downstairs, you know, and take the bus. Because the city was right there, you know, where he worked. And I got a job at Alexandria city schools. And so I could go right across the bridge and, you know, no problem.

So he came home one day, he says, “You know, we're paying all this money in rent when we could have something, you know, for ourselves.” So that Saturday we went, someone had told him to go to Woodbridge, Lakeridge area. It's Lakeridge area. So we went there. They were just building these townhouses. And we talked to the realtor and about eight months they were finished. So we bought the house and we moved there.

I commuted from Alexandria to--I mean from Woodbridge to Alexandria for four years. Then I said, “This traffic is getting to me. I'm going to put my application in down in Prince William County, the county schools.” And I did not get a job. I subbed for a year

and then the next year I had a job. And I worked there until I retired. 32 years in all, between there and here.

ZR: You skipped your degree.

SH: Huh?

ZR: You skipped your degree.

SH: My degree in--

ZR: [Laughing.] Where did you complete your masters?

SH: In George Mason.

ZR: Was that while you were teaching at--in--

SH: No, that's when I was teaching. I graduated 1996. I had already had all my credentials and everything, you know, and I was graduating in December. I was December class. And I graduated December 1996. And see, my husband died in August of '96. So he knew that I had my masters, you know. See, he really helped me a lot, because he was--he had a lot of brains. But he had retired in '92, then he went back in '93. Because he was out like three years before, you know, he died.

And what he did, he had a--everybody wondered, because he was a health nut. He went to the gym three times a week. I mean, he wasn't that fat. But see, he had a history of, his mom died of it and all of his siblings died young, the men, died in their forties, fifties or sixties. And so he had a stroke and he was just taking it too lightly, I guess, because, you

know, he couldn't do things like he couldn't go up the steps sometimes and, you know, I think he just got--after he couldn't drive.

In May he had the stroke. And I was doing all the driving and he didn't like that. And I think, in a way, he gave up. But he had a massive heart attack. That's what he died from. Just like that. I mean, I was--we lived in a townhouse, three-story townhouse. And sometimes I would sleep downstairs, you know, with him, instead of down in the lowest part. But sometimes I would be upstairs in our bedroom.

So that morning, when I came downstairs, and I saw the television not on where it generally is in the morning. And I said, “Now, that's funny.” And I looked over and he was sitting up. I don't think he was dead but they told me he was and I was screaming, you know. They said, try to give him, you know. Which he was a tall guy. But I think they said he died on the way to the hospital. I don't know. But that was just suddenly, too.

Yeah, I've had some trauma to live through.

ZR: Losses.

SH: Yeah.

ZR: And then you moved back to Asheville after that?

SH: I came back--I stayed there from '96 to 2007.

ZR: Oh, wow.

SH: Yeah, because I had to stay up there and finish my--I wanted to retire. I wanted to retire from, you know. I kept teaching. And see, when I went to--when I got my masters

from George Mason, I already had--because I had to do at Mars Hill, when I finished my courses, I had to do something, so I did part of library science. So I couldn't be a real librarian, but I could be like a librarian aide.

ZR: Uh-huh.

SH: So when I went to George Mason, my--I took that and I could have been like an assistant principal, something like that, you know. So after '96 I--no, while I was in the program, I got my librarian degree. Because I had enough hours. And then I became a librarian like four years before I retired.

JN: Did you enjoy that--

SH: I did.

JN: --compared to classroom?

SH: Yes, I did. Because I got to see all the kids, yeah, all the kids in there. And I had an assistant, but in Prince William County, the county that I was in, we had to go in the classrooms. The librarians could not stay in the library. Because they said you have a lot of, you have a secretary assistant. So what I had to do, I had to go into the classrooms. The classroom teachers would come and I had to pull all the resources they were studying, Spain or whatever they were studying. I would pull those and I would go to the classrooms and introduce the, you know, I would introduce the curriculum, whatever they were getting ready to teach and get them the resources.

Yeah, Prince William County was, they started that with the librarians. But I enjoyed it.

JN: That was a nice way to finish up your career.

SH: It was. I loved it. Yes. I really did. Yeah, about 32 years.

JN: What was your favorite time in teaching, looking back on different years and different school districts?

SH: To me, I would say Randolph. I don't know why, but because the kids were so, you know, they were so--because then, you know, you wore heels. I went to school dressed every day. And would say, “Oh, Miss Weston, you look good today.” You know. Or they would, you know, they were just wanting, like they were just, you know, huddling, wanting to learn. And then when I got to Alexandria city schools and I started wearing this stuff, they said, “Where did you come from?"

[Laughter.]

SH: And I was just out of place, you know. Then I went neatly, but not like in heels and all that.

ZR: Put your pants back on.

SH: Yeah. And I met a lot of friends in both systems in Prince William County schools and also the Alexandria city schools. And we still keep in touch. I still have two or three teachers that I still keep in contact with all the time. Yeah. We had like a pact that we would do that.

I really learned a lot after I left from here, you know, because it's a whole new--

ZR: I don't know how you got around.

SH: It was a whole, you know--

ZR: Different way of living.

SH: Uh-huh, it was. Because I can remember my, how I got my job in Alexandria, they had one person to call all the subs. So I was subbing and she called me one morning. Her name was Carol. She said, “Sarah, I've got this second grade class at"--this was at George Mason Elementary. They also had a George Mason Elementary.

And she said, “And I've had three or four subs.” And she said, “None of them will come back.” She said, “Do you want to try it?" So I wanted a job. She said, “I don't know whether the teacher will come back or not.”

This was in October. So I went to the second grade class in October and they were a little hard to mange. I had to pray hard every day. And I never will forget. The principal, his name was Dr. Hercule. She came to look at me, you know Halloween day. Observe me.

ZR: I couldn't think of the word either.

SH: She came to observe me Halloween day. I thought to myself, “Oh, my goodness.” But I must have passed it, because I got the job then, you know, as interim. And then in February the teacher retired. Because she got sick. So she retired. So I stayed. I stayed down there with the second grade.

ZR: You survived that class.

SH: Yes, I did. I did. But the next year, they did this what they call a transitional first grade, where kids--I think it was a real good program. But it didn't last but about five or

six years--where the children that went to kindergarten, they were not quite ready for first grade. So they called them transitional first-graders. And they, I had about, I would only have about 14 or 15. And they were not mature enough to go on to--they may have been academically, but they were not mature enough to go on to first grade.

ZR: [Laughing.]

SH: But I enjoyed that one, too. So I taught that the rest of my three years there at George Mason. And then when I went to Prince William County, the program was down there, and they knew that I had, you know, really--well, I was really the one that helped to, you know, the first ones. We were the ones that started--we didn't start the program but we were the first teachers to be guinea pigs. You know, the first teachers to try this program. And they had it in Prince William County, so that's when I, that's the reason why I, see, I had that on my resumé, so they said, “Oh, we need a"--they called it T1 then--"we need a T1 teacher in Bond[?] Elementary", where I went, so the said okay. And that's how I got the job there.

JN: Were you a first grade teacher most of your career?

SH: Most of my career was third grade.

JN: Okay.

SH: I loved it. I loved it.

ZR: That's a good age.

SH: Yeah. I loved it.

RH: You can run away from third grade. Well, maybe in North Carolina because it was, it used to be that first testing.

SH: Yes. That's when they started that testing. Yes, yes, yes, yes. And then before--see, well, I retired in '99. But if I'd have still been in there, I'd have still been--my principal kept calling me back. I was called back to like three schools. Because they were short of librarians.

So one school, I was there from December till school closed. And the principal begged me, she said, “Sarah, we've interviewed", and I used to help them interview. She said, “We've interviewed so many teachers.” She said, “But you know you have a job.” And I said, “I can't go back in the classroom.”

And then just before I left, I did go back a year. I had a kindergarten class. So I went back to the school that I, you know, first went to. The principal called me, he said, “Sarah, I just need a kindergarten teacher. Please, please, please.”

ZR: [Laughing] You could still be worked.

SH: I was. I was. I said, “I've got to go.” Yeah, because I was sad when I came home. And I tutored here for a while, in the after-school program they had. Then I said, “Sarah, no. I think you need to"--

ZR: Who do you think inspired you the most, in all the ways that you just kept going, even when you had hard times?

SH: Lord. You know, I said if I really hadn't been really religious, as close to Him, you know. Because my parents, you know, my father was a deacon, you know. And really

and truly I always loved the church and worked in the church. And I just prayed and told the Lord, you know, I'm--well, that's what I know, that's kept me going and going. And I said, I've got to make it, you know. And I guess, like I said, when my father, you know--

ZR: He really wanted you to.

SH: And I said I was trying so hard when I got my masters, because I said, “Well, Daddy this is for you.” And I said, “Charles, this is for you", because neither one of them lived to see me do either one. And, you know, that was really a--yeah, It was. So it's been--

ZR: [Laughing] A roller ride. I hope we didn't make you talk too long.

SH: Oh, no, no.

ZR: Especially with a cold. Okay.

RH: It was like I was talking to a young lady this morning and she was--I guess she transitioned in from--where she grew up at to, she was a young white student. She grew up in Massachusetts. She came to Asheville to pursue something. And it didn't work out. So now she's a coffee person, barista. And now she's ready to change. And it's like, “How am I going to do this?"

I'm like, “You need to go talk to Sarah.”

ZR: Yeah, that'll work.

RH: You talk to Sarah.

ZR: How many young people has he sent to you?

RH: Well, part of it is that she, sounds like she was having a problem with her landlord, and it was not quite going right with that. And then, I didn't probe very much. Well, you just have a psychological difference between the two of you. They need to talk to you.

SH: But, you know, it wasn't--now I'm not going to say it was all, you know, roses all the way through. I had some hard times. I mean, you know, very hard times. And really and truly, I think that really--that was one thing that really shocked me into reality. I was so low one time that I was wanting to kill myself, really. You know.

And I think it was when Zenobia Jones found out or something. And she said, “Are you crazy? You've got too much going for you. What is wrong with you?"

And I said, “But there's my children.” I don't know, sometimes because, you know, like we were on--they didn't have food stamps then, but we used to go get the cheese and the, you know. And sometimes, you know, that I didn't really know where my, maybe my next meal was coming from or something like that. But somehow God would always make a way. I mean, you know. Yeah.

And then when my kids, the three oldest ones, what they did, they went to Mars Hill University on this--what program did they have?--who didn't go? Oscar didn't go, but--

ZR: [Laughing] I love your kids' names.

SH: Randy and Stevie and Robbie. Cecil went to--Upward Bound.

ZR: Oh.

SH: Upward Bound. All my kids went to Upward Bound. You know, they gave them a little stipend and they would go in the summer. And then Oscar say [?]... Well, he was a football person. And he went to North Buncombe. He graduated from North Buncombe. But two years they sent him down to Clemson because they just knew he was going to go on and, you know, but he didn't go on to college. He didn't.

Yeah, and then he, somebody put his name in and Atlanta Falcons sent him a letter one time, and I never forget, but he was so out there with the women. So he didn't, that didn't pan out. But he was a very good--he took North Buncombe, the two years, 11th and 12th grade, and he played to them. They won the--everybody talked about Oscar. He was well known.

ZR: Well, they would have had girls at college.

[Laughter.]

SH: I know, I know, I know. But he didn't think that way, you know. Yeah, so, and then Cecil went to--it wasn't--what was AB Tech, this type of school they had out there? Used to have an old--it was a technical school but it wasn't--

RH: Not South College.

SH: Blanton's. Blanton's Business. Yeah, he went there for like three years and Robbie went, my oldest daughter, she went to Charlotte for a couple of years. And then Randy, he went in the Navy and he went to, he married when he was stationed in Kentucky, then he went on to school up there from music, because he'd been a music--because he would have been--I'll tell you how it was in those days.

He was going to North Buncombe, he and my two youngest were. He and Stevie both were going to North Buncombe. And Randy was all into the band, you know, he was in the band. And I know we went to Atlanta one time. They were going down there. And he was going to be the--what you call this--the one that--

JN: The maestro.

RH: The drum major.

JN: Drum major?

SH: Drum major. He was going to be the drum major of North Buncombe. And, my goodness. The kids started doing racially things to him. And Randy's sort of a--he's always been sort of a nervous child. And he came home one day and he was just all upset. He said, “Mama, the teacher said, 'Well, this is the way the Blacks would do it. This is the way something would do it'.” He was explaining something. And that just, you know, it just didn't go well. So I pulled him out of school. I pulled he and my youngest out of school and they went to Asheville High. They finished up. Randy was in the--

ZR: I can tell they're really smart.

SH: Yeah, Randy spent his 11th and 12th grade at Asheville High. And Stevie spent 10th, 11th and 12th at Asheville High. But I just pulled them out. I just pulled them out because, you know, I said I'm not putting my child--

ZR: It was pretty much all white, wasn't it?

SH: Oh, yeah, it was. There were only, I think there was ten, ten Blacks. The rest was white. But I think the reason why Oscar and those got along good was because, see, Oscar played football. You know, they loved him. Robbie played basketball, you know. Cecil, he didn't, but he went along. He was in the middle there, so, you know, they-- And then, but, yeah, I pulled them two out and they was--

JN: And they liked Asheville High?

SH: Yes. Well, Randy was a very, very studious--he was always worked in the dean's office and everything. But Stevie, I had to go down there to him about three or four times. He had a little evilness[?] upstairs. You know, you go around, you're up on the second floor. The last time I went there, I said, “Stevie, if I have to come here, I'm going to throw you off.”

[Laughter.]

SH: Because Mr. Falk was the dean, like the dean of boys or something like that. And he used to tell him, he said, “Are you sure Randy is your brother?" Because Randy was just the opposite of Randy. But Stevie, I told someone, Stevie was supposed to have graduated in '83, maybe, and he fooled around. So he had to go to school the next year, half a year. But he went and he graduated the next year and they were having it at the, up at the Cellular Center or Civic Center then. And when he went across that stage--now they would have throwed me out of there. I said, “Thank you, God!"

[Laughter.]

SH: Because I knew it was the last one.

ZR: I'll bet everybody laughed.

SH: Yes, yes. And then he went on to, he followed his brother and him and Randy has been close. And he followed his brother and he stayed in Indianapolis with his brother up there for a long time, until they both came back home. Yeah, so. Whew!

I said, “How am I still living?"

ZR: You did it, though.

SH: I did it. I look back and know I did it. But, like I tell, I tell my, you know, my grandkids and my great-grandkids, you know. I said, you know, you can do this.

Now, I have one granddaughter that I'm really proud of that's not, she's my oldest grandchild. And she is a social worker. She's gone to Mars Hill. Well, she got her associate from AB Tech. Then she graduated from Mars Hill with her Bachelor's. And now she's going to some college in Tennessee. She's done most of it online in Tennessee. She wants her masters and she's really and, like, she's got her own house. But she's been divorced twice. She's got four children. But, you know, she's got a house. She lives in Weaverville.

And I told someone she lives, she lives just before you get to Woodland Hills. You know where the Ingles is right there and the next right? She lives in a house up there. And I told her, I said, “You know what, Stephanie?" I said, “It wasn't this Woodland Hills, but it was the old Woodland Hills down there. I used to scrub floors.”

ZR: Oh, wow.

SH: I said, “You know, I tell her that, you know, to keep her on track and, so. Yeah. Some of them listen but some of these young people now, some of them, you know, you talk to them and they'll say, “Oh, yeah, Mama Ann.” They all call me Mama Ann.

ZR: Mama what?

SH: Mama Ann.

ZR: Mama Ann?

SH: Yeah, because I told them when I first started having my grandkids, I'm too young to be called grandmother.

ZR: [Laughing.]

SH: So they call me Mama Ann now. But it's been a journey.

RH: Her middle name.

ZR: Her middle name.

SH: My middle name.

ZR: You were probably in the restroom when she told us that.

SH: Oh, dear. Now you know my whole name.

[Laughter.]

RH: Sarah Ann Weston Hart.

[Laughter.]

SH: Put that Roland in first. Yeah, yeah. So.

RH: Well, for my notes, just reviewing everything, you have crossed the lives of a lot of people. You have interacted with, from the beginning, even to now you were sitting in there in the alumni role, related to the alumni role.

SH: Yes. Yes.

RH: I didn't know the story about the part where you said that you went over to the DED program, but the class accepted you back in it and everything. When you said Francine Delaney and Zenobia Jones and Miss Avery, they were some very influential ladies in the education system in Asheville city.

SH: Yes. Yes, they were.

RH: Their names are--

SH: You know, that's where that school is named after?

RH: Right. Francine Delaney, named after her.

SH: Yes, she was really, really instrumental and she would come by the school and check on us. Right. Uh-huh.

Yeah, I try to be, like I said, now president of the alumni.

ZR: [Laughing.]

SH: You know, Stephens-Lee alumni.

JN: You won't slow down.

SH: That's what my--

JN: You like people. You like people.

ZR: You were probably praising God and they thought you were saying ...[?]

[Laughter.]

SH: But I guess I'm just, I can't stop. You know, I really want to continue to help people or try to tell them, you know, something--influence them. Even say, you know, I haven't had a rosy life, you know. Everybody makes mistakes. I still make mistakes. Nobody is perfect, you know. But you can be a little bit, you know. It's out there. You can do a few things.

ZR: Make a difference.

SH: Make a difference. You can make a difference. And I can tell them I'm going to write a story and I want them all to have a copy of it. So.

ZR: Well, you will be able to pass this recording around.

JN: It will be typed up and transcribed, also.

SH: Oh, okay.

JN: So those who like to watch it or listen to it, or those who listen and want to read about it, that will be your life story.

SH: Oh, good. Okay.

ZR: Sarah, sometime if you have some extra time, if you--I would love it if we could scan a few of your photos, like of your parents, if you have that.

SH: Okay. Oh, I do.

ZR: We can add it to this.

SH: And when I was small.

ZR: Little Sarah. And we want to see the flirty Sarah at 16.

[Laughter.]

RH: And the Zeda shirt.

SH: Oh, yeah, the Zedas. Yes. I'm also president of the Zedas. But people tell me I should put a NO on my-- But like I tell them, sometimes in our meetings here we only have maybe eight to ten members, you know, who come. But like I told them, as long as I live and in good health and, you know, my mind is good and everything, I said, I hope Stephens-Lee will, you know, Stephens-Lee should labor on.

Because what we need to do, and we haven't done it yet--we did it one time last year, we brought some young people in here--they need to know, you know, something about some of the history of Stephens-Lee. They really do. We give out scholarships and, you know, sometimes the kids come back from scholarship and talk, you know. But we really need a program where we could bring kids in. We try to tell people, you know, the ones that graduated, that's from here, bring your grandkids and great-grandkids. Let them come.

ZR: Seems like Dwayne Barnet[?] would be good at bringing young kids in, talking about it.

SH: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh. Because I think they need to know, you know, it hasn't always been. And I tell you, Stephens-Lee was a beautiful, beautiful school. But like they said, you know, I think that the real problem was, is when they--they did not want the white kids to go to a Black school.

JN: You mean the school board or--

SH: Yeah.

JN: --or the community as a whole?

SH: The community as a whole, everybody, yeah. Because it was a beautiful gorgeous school. It was.

RH: A footnote to that is, somebody I was talking to the other day, and evidently this was written by Asheville High. But the new rule they're coming out--they're putting like a million dollars, something outrageous--I don't know quite what the price is because I haven't studied it yet. But people were just saying, “They're spending all that money over there for whatever for, and they could have done the same thing over here." People were plain upset.

SH: Really. Really. It's true. It's true.

JN: It is the same that the building could not have been preserved. It could have been used for all kinds of things.

SH: It could have been, that's right.

JN: I know there was talk of the middle school for a while. Today it would be a grand community center. Mega kind of thing. It's a shame.

SH: I'm just glad they're doing what they're doing to the Reid Center.

RH: Yeah, they have a couple of programs in there.

SH: Yeah, they said they do.

RH: And a kitchen and I guess all the rooms are about they were.

SH: Now, see, that's Mountain Street they tore down. No, they didn't tear it down. What is it?

RH: Part of it is still there. Administrative offices for the Asheville City Schools, it's still there.

SH: They tore Hill Street down.

RH: Yeah, Hill Street, and now they've built, what do they call it, Isaac Dixon up there. But that's--schools all across the country and all across the south, in particular, where whites did not want their kids to be associated with, I guess, the name of the school, no matter what was going on right.

SH: That's true.

RH: And so then those schools are now--some of them set idle and some of them are still standing and some of them are learning centers. So it's all kinds of things. Some of them

just disappeared. Somewhere I was going home the other day and I'm like, I can remember when I was 18 back in the seventies, come by here and then there was Washington High School over here. But now you pass it and it's like a playground. A couple of swing sets up.

JN: No building?

RH: No building whatever. And that was the, where I grew up at, I went off to college in '68 and the school system boycotted--the Blacks in the community boycotted the system, the school system, the whole year, most of them. Half of the next year before they decided to-- And it was the same thing. “I'm not sending my kids to a Black school.” And then the Blacks were upset, were saying-- That was when Black communities also said that “This is our school.” Because there was so much going on at the school, that they would feel that they had--it just was not a building, it was a community.

JN: Oh, yes.

RH: Right.

ZR: Sarah, I had one last thing I wanted to ask you. If you know if the people that were researching the Weaverville School for Blacks, trying to find out if it was a Rosenwald School. Did anybody ever prove or disprove it?

SH: They said it was not. That's what Geraldine said. Geraldine Ray said they researched it all and said it was not.

ZR: Huh. It looks so much like other ones.

SH: I know. But as I said, they moved it. And I don't know if that--because they say you can't do anything to them, the schools. And see, they moved that school down at the bottom. Like I told you, it was down at the bottom of the hill? They moved it up where it is now. And then they put some new stuff in it, you know, and everything. Because it used to belong to the city.

RH: I think I was in Raleigh a couple of weeks ago, and there was a Rosenwald School alumni group or--preserving. And I remember looking on there and I went like, okay, where is it at? And I didn't see it on their list of schools. But then I couldn't figure out whether or not they were just saying ones that were still standing or whether or not they meant a list of where Rosenwald schools may have been put.

ZR: Uh-huh. So that one article I meant to bring you had her, I believe, and her husband talking about the school.

SH: Oh, really?

ZR: I think so. And at that point they didn't know yet. They were going to--they had mentioned what other steps you can take to find out. I'm glad it got saved.

SH: Yeah, I'm glad that they did this in, you know, Mars Hill. They finally, finally, you know, got it going.

ZR: Because apparently we've lost a lot, or most of them, like three-fourths of them. I talked to two people that were very educated and aware of things and they'd never heard of Rosenwald schools.

SH: Oh, really.

RH: I was somewhere the other day taking pictures of a church. And I went up on the hill and it would be like, oh, this used to be the spot for the Rosenwald School in Brevard.

JN: Yeah, they were all over. All over the south.

ZR: Yeah. Well, I'll get back with you, Sarah, and you maybe can meet me at Pack Library and scan some of your photographs and I can give them right back to you?

SH: Uh-huh.

ZR: That would be great. Okay.

[Talked about parking.]

ZR: Is your new house going to be in Weaverville?

SH: My apartment?

ZR: You're getting an apartment?

SH: Yeah. It's going to be--I'm going back to South Asheville. I can't go back to Weaverville.

[Laughter.]

SH: Do you know where Givens at Gerber Park is building?

ZR: Yep. You going there?

SH: Yeah. And it won't be ready till July, July 1.

ZR: I was hoping we'd be neighbors.

[Laughter.]

SH: No, I can't go back to Weaverville.

ZR: Okay.

SH: Mars Hill, no.

ZR: You keep going forward, that's the thing.

SH: Yeah, I like it out that way really well. I told--I'm currently staying with my son on Pine Grove. And I told him, I said, “It's so nice not to have to fight that traffic on Hendersonville Highway.”

JN: Sarah, thank you. You talk about yourself in a very easy way.

SH: Oh, I do?

JN: I've done some interviews with a different focus, where there's a question--.

SH: Well, I hope I haven't rattled too much. I go from here to there to--.

ZR: That's what you're supposed to do.

JN: But you just went from one topic to another and you allowed us to interrupt you with key questions and then--. That makes it easy for everybody.

END OF INTERVIEW.